

Testimony of

**Kari Yacawych**

**Shelton Educator**

Before the

Education Committee

March 15, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee.

I testify today in support of House Bill 6884. This bill takes important steps toward addressing the educator shortage in Connecticut, showing educators that theirs is a respected profession, and ensuring that our classrooms and schools can provide the best possible education for our students.

Minimum Teacher Salary - I believe raising teachers' salaries is necessary to attract people into the teaching profession. Teachers are required to have a master's degree. If this is a requirement, those entering the field should have similar pay to other occupations that require a master's degree. It is also important to recognize teaching hours go beyond contracted hours. I have been teaching for 28 years and there is no way I could have been successful without getting up at 4:00 am on many occasions, working weekends and setting up my "car office" while my own children participated in afterschool activities. COVID Benefit Enhancement – This is precisely the reason people will not be entering this field. It is a manipulation to get people to stay. If someone is at the point of retirement in these next few years they will not be acknowledged for their work during the pandemic. ALL teachers, regardless of their years of experience, had to adapt to a way of teaching that was unfamiliar and uncomfortable. ALL teachers tried to make it feel as normal as possible for their students and families. Being the Library Media Specialist, I was on the phone with parents at all hours trying to get them to connect their computers to the lessons they needed to complete, learning new technologies, and creating multiple "How-To" videos for staff and families. From creating Google Classrooms to making a video of all teachers singing the school song from their homes, it was something that could not be shut off. There have been a lot of challenges throughout my teaching career, but this was the hardest and the stress took a toll on me physically. Teachers who taught in 2019 and 2020 ALL deserve the same compensation. A COVID benefit should be given for recognition of a job well done, a thank you, it is abusive to use it to entice people to stay longer.

Teacher Tax Credit - \$500 refundable income tax credit for teachers with an Initial Certificate I have spent more than this during this school year and I have a Professional Educator Certificate. This is something that should be afforded to ALL teachers. This is exactly why people will not be entering this field. Teachers know they will be spending out of pocket every year, not just in the first few years. Curriculum changes constantly and town/city budgets aren't adequately funded. Teachers, regardless of their certificate status, supplement the curriculum. It was about my 17th year of teaching when my second-grade team was told we could find materials on the internet for the new math curriculum. This year, we not only had to spend money out of pocket but also an excessive amount of time searching on the internet for appropriate lessons to coincide with the expectations. Raising the Kindergarten Start Age - This is what is best for students. I have seen parents struggle with sending their four-year-old or keeping them home another year. Students should be 5 when they enter kindergarten. Expectations of kindergarten are far from what they used to be when I started teaching. What I was teaching in first grade, is now the kindergarten curriculum. Play-Based Learning - This is something that should be implemented because it is what is best for children. It should be implemented because there is a substantial amount of research that supports it. Duty-Free Prep Time - Teachers need uninterrupted prep periods because they need this time to send emails, and plan (this can't even be done in the 30-minute uninterrupted prep because there is whole group instruction, small group instruction, and planning for individual needs-teachers will continue outside school hours) Educator Bill of Rights - BOEs to adopt an Educator Bill of Rights: (1) environment free from threats or harassment: I would hope this would include teachers protected from being punched, kicked, bit, and spit on by students in school. This is another reason why students should be 5 when they enter kindergarten and have PBL.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

